

A Note On Broomrape, *Orobanche minor*

Roger Keey

25 Montclare Ave., Christchurch

On returning last September from a visit to England and Denmark, with its very different 'indigenous' flora, I noticed growing under a *Brachyglottis greyii* bush a brownish, leafless plant. Could it be a yellow bird's nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*) which grows in the northern pine and beech woods, though never common, or even a bird's nest orchid which grows in similar habitats? Advice from Ian Tweedy was sought who, however, identified the plant as broomrape (*Orobanche minor*). All three plants have two-lipped flowers, but the lower lip of the broomrape is three-lobed whereas that of the yellow bird's nest has two. Broomrape, like the *Monotropa*, is a saprophyte, lacking chlorophyll, and thus is parasitic. According to Hilgendorf (1942), broomrape is a pasture plant, whose seeds germinate in the ground, pushing out a root until it meets a root of a potential host plant, often clover, lucerne or cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*). The parasite appears above ground as a fleshy stem, initially rather like an asparagus spear. Eventually the brownish stem is crowned with numerous tubular flowers which produce an abundance of very fine seeds (about 20 000 per plant), but very few on germination will find a host root to continue the life cycle. Curiously, the parasitic plant in my garden only grows under *Brachyglottis* species. And I have only seen it once elsewhere, growing under one of these shrubby groundsel in the grounds of the University.

Reference

Hilgendorf, F.W. 1942. **Weeds of New Zealand**, 3rd Edition. Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, Christchurch